

Oral health access/infrastructure

Nevada State Oral Health Advisory Committee

Community Coalition for Oral Health

Northern Nevada Dental Coalition for
Underserved Populations



What are the Public Health Issues? Oral health is integral to general health.¹ The following three issues have contributed to a large underserved population. This population primarily consists of low income, minority, and medically and developmentally compromised persons who have difficulty obtaining dental care and who suffer from poor oral health.

Uninsured: For every child without medical insurance, there are 2.6 children without dental insurance (equivalent to 23 million children without dental insurance).² For every adult without medical insurance, there are three adults without dental insurance (85 million uninsured adults).³

Medicare/Medicaid coverage: Medicare does not provide coverage for routine dental care, and Medicaid offers limited coverage for those over 20 years of age. Medicaid providers have traditionally faced low reimbursement rates and cumbersome reimbursement procedures that have often hindered their abilities to care for Medicaid beneficiaries.

Disparities in oral health for underserved:⁶

- *Poor children suffer 2x the decay, and are 3x as likely to have unmet oral health needs.*
- *<20% of Medicaid children receive preventive dental services.*
- *25% of poor children never visit a dentist before kindergarten.*
- *Uninsured children are 2.5 times less likely to receive dental care as insured children.*
- *14.2% of uninsured vs. 6.6% insured reported no dental visit in last five years.*

Manpower/“safety net:” In 1998, less than 1% of dentists worked as public health specialists and less than 13% of the population served by community health centers received basic dental care.^{4,5} Only 4% of dental care is publicly funded compared to 32% of medical care.¹

What about Nevada?

Insurance: It is likely that at least 38.5% of Nevada’s seniors are without dental coverage.⁷ Data from the 2003 Healthy Smile – Happy Child Survey indicate that the most common reasons Nevada’s children do not get dental care when they need it are: 1) inability to pay for it; 2) lack of insurance; 3) difficulty in getting an appointment; and 4) dentist not accepting Medicaid/insurance.⁸

Manpower/“safety net:” There are 2,365 residents per dentist in Nevada vs. 1,675 residents per dentist nationwide.^{9, 10} As of March 2003, 13 Nevada counties are federally designated dental health professional shortage areas.¹¹ As of August 2003, of the 971 dentists who had licenses to practice in Nevada and provided the State Board of Dental Examiners with a Nevada address, 299 (30%) were listed as Medicaid

providers.¹² In 2003, of the 971 licensed dentists, 183 of them were reimbursed \$1,000 or more by Nevada Medicaid (19 %) and 109 of them were reimbursed more than \$10,000 (11%).¹²

What is Nevada doing?

- **Medicaid/SCHIP:** In Clark County, Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) dental services are provided within a mandatory, fully capitated managed care program. The two managed care organizations (MCO), Health Plan of Nevada and Nevada Health Solutions, have contracted with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) School of Dental Medicine to serve as the provider of dental care for their Medicaid and SCHIP clients in Clark County. The school receives a capitated rate, and dental services are provided at six sites; three community clinics, the School of Medicine General Practice Dental Residency Program, the School of Medicine Pediatric Dental Residency Program, and the Community College of Southern Nevada Faculty Practice. There are some private dentists who subcontract with UNLV and receive the regular fee-for-service reimbursement. Between February 2002 and January 2003, the UNLV School of Dentistry program and its network of dentists treated over 30,000 Medicaid and SCHIP recipients and other low-income individuals, 90 percent of whom were children. Approximately 35 percent of the dental services provided were preventive and 65 percent restorative.
- **The University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Dental Medicine:** The School of Dental Medicine is working to address access in two ways. One is through an increase in the number of practitioners in Nevada. The first class of 75 students was accepted in the fall of 2002; 43 of them were from Nevada. In the second class, 49 of the 75 students were from Nevada. In addition to increasing the number of practitioners in Nevada, the school provides direct services to low-income clients in the Las Vegas area. It is anticipated that, annually, over 100,000 patient visits will be delivered at the new Shadow Lane Campus.
- **The University of Nevada School of Medicine (UNSOM):** The Pediatric Dental Residency (PDR) program and the General Practice Residency (GPR) program are both located within the UNSOM. The GPR program accepts six residents a year. The program is one year in length and residents have the option of staying for a second year. The PDR program accepts three residents a year for a two-year residency.
- **Dental Hygiene Programs:** The Community College of Southern Nevada Dental Hygiene Program and Truckee Meadows Community College provide low cost preventive services to the community.
- **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE):** WICHE provides funding for dental school tuition. Nevada residents who wish to attend dental school have a choice of two programs, the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP) and the Health Care Access Program (HCAP). In the PSEP, the student's tuition is paid directly to the school on the student's behalf at a reduced rate. The student must repay 25 percent of the support fee within 5-10 years after graduation and return to Nevada to practice dentistry for as many years as the student received support. In the HCAP, the tuition is paid directly to the school on the student's behalf at a reduced rate. The student is not required to repay any portion of the funds. However, the student must return to Nevada and practice in a dentally underserved region or with a dentally underserved population for two years. The penalties on these programs are severe; if the student does not fulfill the requirements, the student is required to pay triple

the principal and 8 percent interest compounded daily. There are currently 72 dentists with a WICHE obligation.

- **Health Access Washoe County:** Health Access Washoe County (HAWC) is a community health center dedicated to providing low cost primary and preventive medical and dental services to people who do not currently have access to the health care system. In addition to accepting Medicaid and SCHIP, HAWC also offers a sliding fee scale. In 2003, HAWC provided over 15,944 dental visits.
- **Saint Mary's Take Care-A-Van/Northern Nevada Dental Health Program:** Saint Mary's administers four different dental programs: a mobile van that provides restorative dental treatment, a mobile van that provides dental sealants, a dental sealant program utilizing portable dental equipment, and the Northern Nevada Dental Health Program (NNDHP.) The restorative van rotates among eight locations in Washoe and Lyon Counties. Medicaid and Nevada ✓Check Up clients are seen. Uninsured clients are seen using a sliding fee scale. Dental sealant services are provided on the mobile van in a four county area at 47 elementary schools. From July 1, 2002 through February 13, 2003, dental sealants were placed on 1,096 second-grade children. The portable equipment is also used to place dental sealants on second graders in northern rural schools where greater than 50 percent of the enrolled children are eligible for free and reduced lunch or where access to care is severely limited. NNDHP is a cooperative program of the Northern Nevada Dental Society and Saint Mary's. Volunteer dentists are matched with low-income children in need of dental services. Over 100 northern Nevada dentists participate in the program.
- **Miles for Smiles:** Miles for Smiles provides comprehensive dental services by licensed dental professionals utilizing mobile dental equipment; case management and referral services for ongoing treatment for patients initially seen on the mobile unit; an educational program for children enrolled at targeted high-risk schools; and a community and public relations campaign dedicated to addressing oral health issues faced by at-risk populations. From July 1, 2002 through March 26, 2003, Miles for Smiles performed 3,824 procedures and provided \$208,652 worth of services.
- **St. Rose Dominican Positive Impact Program** - The Positive Impact program, offered through St. Rose Dominican Hospitals since 1988, identifies children in need of emergency dental care through school nurses in area elementary, middle and high schools. Dentists donate their time and services to children who require emergency care. The program services 70 schools in Henderson and the Southeast areas with clients reaching as far as Searchlight and Boulder City. The Positive Impact program is restricted to referrals by school nurses.
- **Huntridge Teen Dental Clinic** - Huntridge Teen Dental Clinic provides preventive and restorative dentistry to uninsured adolescents residing in Clark County. A dental hygienist is employed two days a week to provide preventive services. Volunteer dentists provide restorative services.
- **Early Childhood Caries Prevention Curriculum:** The curriculum is intended for individuals whose work brings them into regular contact with the families of young children age 0-3 years. In 2003, Early Childhood Caries prevention education was presented 26 times to 218 health care providers.
- **Channel 10, Ready to Learn, Reading For Smiles Dental Health Workshops** - Ready to Learn is a nationwide Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) initiative implemented at the local level by PBS stations. In Las Vegas, KLVX-TV and the Junior League of Las Vegas have teamed up to tackle a serious issue

facing children in our community – dental health. Since good physical health helps children arrive at school, “Ready To Learn,” KLVX staff and Junior League volunteers work closely to provide dental health resources to families in need. The joint project, initiated in October 2001 and dubbed Reading For Smiles, consists of family workshops featuring song and hands-on activities. Children who participate in these workshops take home resource bags stuffed with new toothbrushes, dental flossers, an age-appropriate dental health book, and a variety of resource materials for parents. The Reading For Smiles program is made possible through funding and support from the Junior League of Las Vegas, with local dentists, hygienists, and community health agencies collaborating to provide dental health resources to families in need. Each year, over 60 Reading For Smiles workshops are conducted, reaching more than 2,000 children and their parents in the greater Las Vegas community.

Strategies for Nevada’s future:

- ✓ *Continue funding and supporting above mentioned programs and legislative initiatives.*
- ✓ *Increase ratio of dentists to population in rural and underserved areas.*
- ✓ *Allow volunteer service to apply towards continuing education requirements for dental professionals.*
- ✓ *Explore options to increase capacity to provide oral health services to managed care clients.*
- ✓ *Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates.*
- ✓ *Simplify eligibility and reimbursement processes for Medicaid and Nevada Check Up.*
- ✓ *Promote expansion of Medicaid to include coverage for adult dental services.*
- ✓ *Support programs to expand insurance coverage (employer based coverage).*
- ✓ *Support efforts for data collection and surveillance to better understand Nevada's access needs.*
- ✓ *Support proven community-based prevention strategies (water fluoridation and sealant programs).*
- ✓ *Encourage community health centers to include a dental health component.*
- ✓ *Support mobile/portable dental services where appropriate and feasible.*

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